

THE POPULARITY OF CALVINISM.

Some worldly people have estimated Calvinism according to its popularity. Nothing unpopular has any charms for them. The Master whom Calvinists adore foretold his own unpopularity, and its consequences—the cross. But He comforted His followers by the prediction that He would draw all men unto Him. Calvinism is the gospel in its purest form, and is destined to cover the earth. Its text-book is the Bible, the most popular Book in the world, with a rapidly increasing circulation. Its most widely circulated portion is the New Testament, with Paul's Epistles, a store-house of Calvinistic proof-texts, now extant in over two hundred languages.

The most popular expression of Calvinistic belief, and the most attractive, is in hymns. Evangelical hymnals have had a vast circulation. Small and inferior hymn-books have sometimes made the fortunes of their compilers or publishers. Almanacs are not so frequent as the editions constantly appearing. The older hymns, in this stream of publications, prove the most permanent and popular of all.

For illustration, take one theme of Calvinistic teaching that has provoked criticism, as being most repulsive and unpopular—that of preterition. In great fear of its unpopularity, it was urged some years ago that it be eliminated from all our creeds. The late Rev. Dr. W. G. T. Shedd in his book, "Calvinism Pure and Mixed," strongly objected to any such omission in future. The Presbyterian Church would thus have "a mutilated creed, and will resemble a wounded eagle attempting to fly with but one wing." He has a chapter on "Preterition and the Lop-sided View of the Divine Decree." The form of this doctrine, as given in the Westminster Confession of Faith, ought to be familiar. After speaking of the elect, it says: "The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sins, to the praise of his glorious justice."

The absurdity of omitting this, is seen at a glance, on turning to the hymnals. Appeals based on this very doctrine, are moving the greatest evangelistic meetings of our day, making more solemn, profound, tender impressions than anything else, while they sing preterition:

"Pass me not, O gracious Father,
Sinful though my heart may be;
Thou might'st pass me, but the rather
Let thy mercy light on me. Even me!

"Delay not, delay not: the spirit of grace,
Long grieved and resisted, may take its sad flight,
And leave thee in darkness to finish thy race,
To sink in the vale of eternity's night.

"Too late! too late!" will be the cry—
"Jesus of Nazareth has passed by."

"Admit him ere his anger burn,
His feet, departed, ne'er return."

"Sad, sad, that bitter wail,
'Almost—but lost!'"

In definition, Rev. A. A. Hodge said: "What is the ground of the eternal predestination of individuals to salvation? Every Christian must take one side or other of this question. If he takes the side which makes foreseen faith the ground, he is an Arminian, no matter what else he holds. If he takes the side which makes the good pleasure of God the ground, he is a Calvinist." Calvinists accordingly invite Arminian friends to join in singing:

Wakened up from wrath to flee."
"Chosen not for good in me,

"Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

"'Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin."

Another phase of Calvinistic teaching is the Perseverance of the Saints. Multitudes who have not been trained in Calvinistic schools have adopted this doctrine, and freely express their aversion for those who assert that they are of the elect, but who do not persevere in good works. Perhaps to the classic melody from Gottschalk's "Last Hope," they sing:

"Heaven and earth may pass away,
God's free grace shall not decay;
Those whom Jesus once hath loved
From his grace are never moved."

Theologians warn us against narrow views of Calvinism. With a base as broad as the Scriptures, it has more than one topic. It is not like the easy religion demanded by a French statesman, one "with a couple of doctrines." There are Calvinistic views of God and his providence:

"God moves in a mysterious way."

"He leadeth me, O blessed thought."

Numerous hymns describing conversion or religious experience, Calvinists claim as their own.

"The Shepherd sought his sheep,
The Father sought his child."

"'Tis thine, eternal, Spirit, thine,
To form the heart anew."

As never before, Calvinists are girding themselves for a world conquest.

"Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth."

Finally, any unpopularity of true Calvinists of the present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them.

"O sweet and blessed country!
The home of God's elect!"

—The Presbyterian.